

AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST

NEW SERIES

ORGAN OF THE AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION,
THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON,
AND THE AMERICAN ETHNOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF NEW YORK

PUBLICATION COMMITTEE

F. W. HODGE, *Chairman ex-officio*; PLINY E. GODDARD, *Secretary ex-officio*;
HIRAM BINGHAM, STEWART CULIN, A. A. GOLDENWEISER,
GEORGE BYRON GORDON, WALTER HOUGH, NEIL M. JUDD, A. L.
KROEBER, BERTHOLD LAUFER, EDWARD SAPIR, MARSHALL H.
SAVILLE, JOHN R. SWANTON, ALFRED M. TOZZER.

PLINY E. GODDARD, *Editor*, New York City
JOHN R. SWANTON and ROBERT H. LOWIE, *Associate Editors*

VOLUME 18

LANCASTER, PA., U. S. A.

PUBLISHED FOR

THE AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

1916

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
DAVIS

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF IROQUOIAN VILLAGE SITES OF WESTERN NEW YORK

By FREDERICK HOUGHTON

STUDY of any Indian village or camp site in western New York shows clearly the fact that it falls naturally into one of three groups, each of which is distinguished by its own type of remains and its own peculiarities of situation. These three groups can be correlated with the occupancy of the territory by three different types of people. One group must be definitely ascribed to people of Iroquoian stock. A second group can be ascribed to a non-Iroquoian people of unknown identity, and there seems to be sufficient evidence to warrant a belief that the third group may be ascribed to wanderers from southern Ohio.

The existence of these different groups, each with its own characteristics, has been recognized by but few archeologists. Mr. Arthur Parker, New York State Archeologist, has repeatedly called attention to the difference in types of the archeological remains in western and central New York. Mr. Wintemberg, now with the Ottawa museum, has commented upon this same difference in the Canadian peninsula. In a study of the village sites of Seneca, Neuter, and other Iroquoian peoples, which I have carried on for the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences, I have found and noted this difference constantly.

The Iroquoian sites of western New York have received a great deal of intensive study and this study has yielded a large amount of material from which may be derived a standard of characteristics of the culture of various Iroquoian nations, both before and after their contact with Europeans. Unfortunately no such intensive study has been made of the non-Iroquoian sites in the territory immediately contiguous to New York, either in Pennsylvania or Canada. It is true that there exist in both places numerous collections of artifacts found in territory known to have

been inhabited by Algonkian nations, and probably for the most part of Algonkian origin. Some of these collections have been made by skilled collectors yet their work is either unpublished, or else it is published in such form that no definite characteristics of Algonkian culture can be ascertained.

A careful and intensive study of sites well established by history



Photo by Cummings.

FIG. 57.—Artifacts from a refuse heap of a pre-European site in South Buffalo. Iroquoian characteristics are well shown: note the points, the articles of bone and antler, the clay pipes, and the decorations of the potsherds.

to have been occupied by Iroquois has led me to consider the characteristics of Iroquoian sites of western New York to be as follows (fig. 57):

An elevated position with evidences of defensive works.

Refuse heaps and ash pits.

Abundant, small, triangular, chert points.

Abundance of clay kettles and pipes, fragmentary or entire.

Abundant articles made of bone and antler.

An absence of large, notched or shouldered points, and grooved axes.

An absence of artifacts made of steatite, quartzite, argillite or other materials foreign to this territory.

An absence of problematical articles made of slate, as bird stones, gorgets, banner stones, and tubes.

The most conspicuous feature of an Iroquoian site is the black earth which marks its surface. This black earth is usually segregated into spots which are scattered irregularly over the surface



FIG. 58.—A refuse heap on a terrace slope at Belmont. A site occurs on the level ground above it. From it come bone articles, animal bones and potsherds, some of which can be seen in the picture.

of the site, or which mantle the slopes of any nearby ravine. These spots are the remains of the refuse heaps of the village and consist of the decayed animal and vegetable refuse of its houses mixed with

the ashes and charcoal of its fires. Many heaps are large, some being thirty feet in diameter and three or four feet deep. Scattered through this mass of earth are great numbers of bones of the animals and fish which served as food for the villagers. Mingled with these animal remains are representatives of all the imperishable articles which were in use in the village. Many of these are fragmentary. They were discarded and thrown into the refuse because they had been broken. Many, however, are entire (fig. 58).

Somewhat similar to the refuse heaps are the ash pits, which occur rather frequently upon Iroquoian sites. These are pits about three feet in depth filled with ashes and charcoal. Artifacts are occasionally found in these pits.

A very constant characteristic of the Iroquoian sites of western New York and of that portion at least of Ontario which lies between

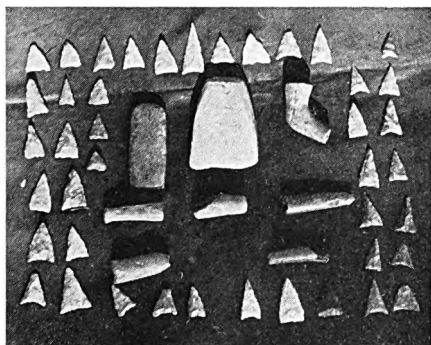


FIG. 59.—Articles from a small site at Conewango where refuse heaps occur, containing animal bones and potsherds. Only triangular points are found.

the Niagara and the Detroit rivers is the small, triangular chert point. This type of point is very abundant and, upon pure Iroquoian sites, it occurs to the entire exclusion of all other types. For instance, from one refuse heap on an Iroquoian site in South Buffalo I took a hundred and fifty of these small, triangular points, but not one of the notched or shouldered type. Of hundreds of points found on an early Seneca site at Richmond Mills, every one is triangular. They even occur in the graves of historic villages, from which I have

taken perhaps fifty, some of which are made of European flint. It is significant that brass arrow points found on historic Iroquoian sites are all triangular.

These triangular chert points are thin, keen-edged points, nearly always well made and frequently beautifully made. They range from a half inch to an inch and a half in length, and are apt to be narrow as compared with their length (fig. 59).

Another constant characteristic of these Iroquoian sites is the abundance of articles made of bone and antler (fig. 60). These are most often found in refuse heaps or ash pits where the conditions

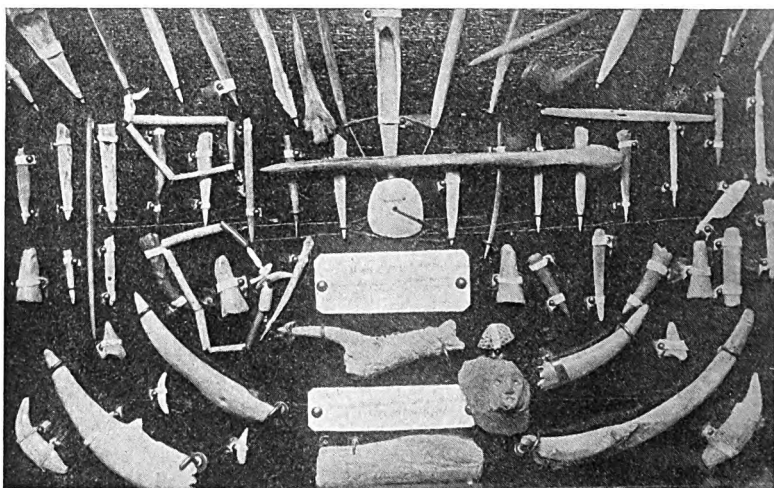


FIG. 60.—These bone articles were found in deep refuse heaps at Clifton Springs and Hopewell. Note harpoons, punches and worked phalangeal bones. Heman I. Coates, collector.

necessary for their preservation seem to have been most favorable, but a few have been found in graves. Bone awls are abundant. Fish hooks, harpoons, and needles are less common but still fairly numerous. Late prehistoric and early historic sites yield many combs marvelously well carved of bone. Cylinders made of bone or antler are fairly numerous. That these were used in making chert points is amply proved by their presence in three complete flaking outfits which I found in graves on Seneca and Neuter sites. Antler

gouges or hoes are occasionally found. Smoothed, flattened, and perforated phalangeal bones of unknown use are numerous.

One of the unmistakable characteristics of an Iroquoian site is the abundance of vessels and pipes made of clay. These occur both in the graves and in the refuse heaps. The refuse contains great numbers of fragments with only an occasional entire specimen, but in the graves are many entire vessels and pipes. Most of these are decorated with a large variety of designs which are constant throughout the territory once inhabited by the Iroquois.

A high situation and evidences of strong defenses are very characteristic of Iroquoian sites, and distinguish them at once from the innumerable sites along the watercourses (fig. 61). These hill-fort villagers seemed not to depend upon streams or lakes either

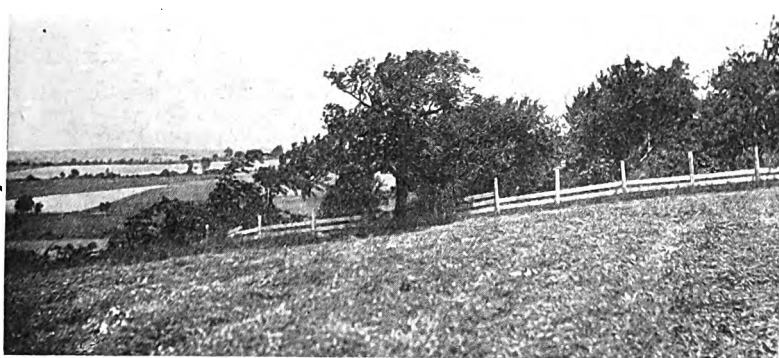


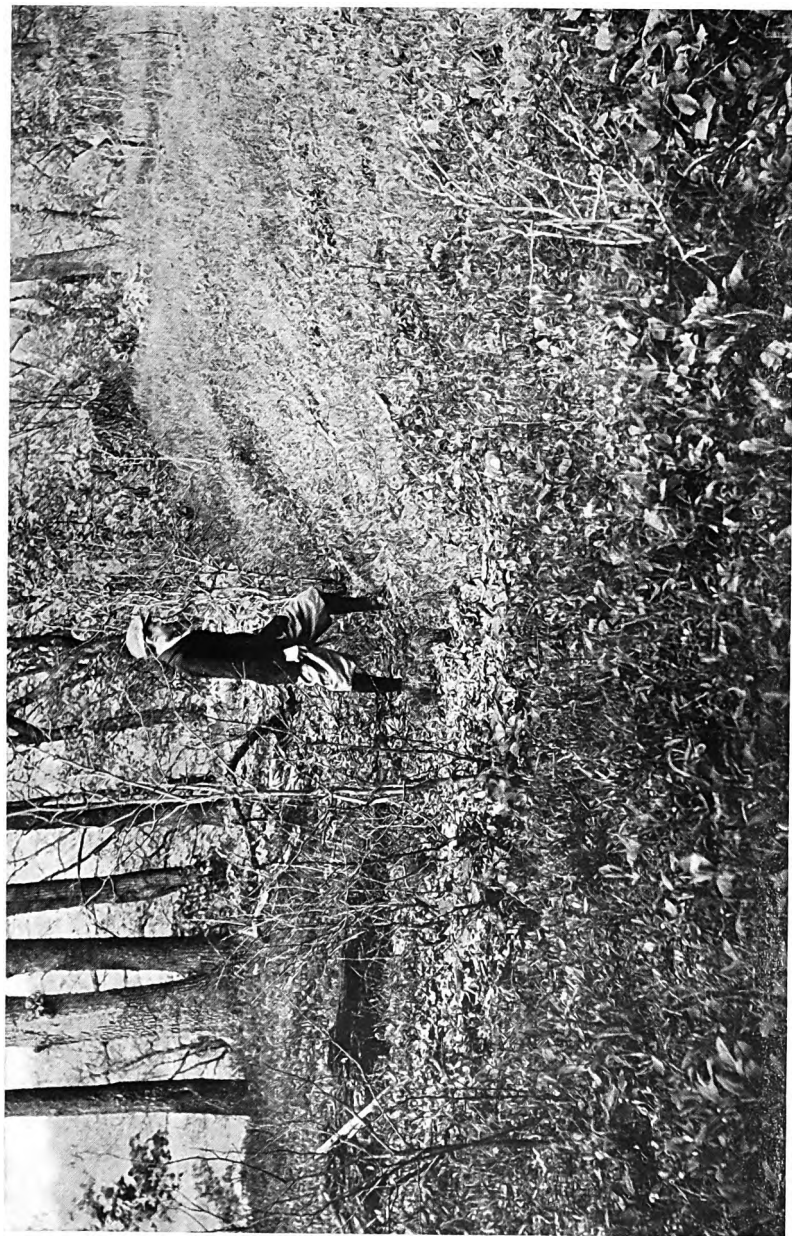
FIG. 61.—A site near Livonia. It covers the top of a high hill. A bank once followed the edge of the slope. Many bone articles, triangular points and potsherds have been found here. It is early post-European Seneca.

for a water supply, for food, or for travel. They seemed rather to avoid them and to depend for a water supply upon springs, evidently believing that defense rather than a food or water supply was of first importance. Some of these sites crown the highest hills of Allegany, Cattaraugus, and Chautauqua counties, a region of high hills. In the more level country farther north the sites are always to be found upon the highest points. The defenses are indicated now only by earth embankments, the bases of palisades which at one time surrounded the villages (pl. XXIII).

I have already stated that it is my belief that these peculiarities of culture characterize some of the Iroquoian village sites of western New York, and have assumed for convenience that this is true. There is ample proof that these characteristics are constant throughout all the Iroquoian villages of western New York, no matter to what nation they may be ascribed, and not only during the pre-European period but during the early post-European period as well. And every evidence seems to indicate that they are common, also, to other nations of Iroquoian stock beyond the limits of this territory, though in some cases they may be modified somewhat to meet differences in environment.

A careful study of certain sites, well established by history to be the great Seneca villages of the last half of the seventeenth century has shown that in that branch of the Iroquois, even after two generations of contact with Europeans, the peculiarities of culture which I have called distinctively Iroquoian were unmistakable. Even in villages, which existed as late as our Revolution, these same characteristics were evident. The defended, elevated site, whose surface was littered with the black earth of deep refuse heaps, yielded the triangular point of chert, or of trader's brass in the same form, fragments of pottery with the identical decorations of earlier times, beautifully made clay pipes, and even a few articles made of bone and antler, although these had long since given place in general use to those of steel.

In the immediate vicinity of the early historic towns of the Seneca are still earlier village sites. The relationship between these and the later well-known Seneca sites is so close, their remains so similar, that there can be no doubt that these sites were occupied by Seneca villages of an earlier period. The abundant European articles on some, the scanty European articles on others and their absence on still others show that these villages were occupied at a period during which the villagers first came into contact with Europeans. They evidently mark the abode of the Seneca from their latest pre-European period until their earliest post-European period. In all these sites the remains are identical with those of later Seneca sites of historic time, excepting, of course, that the proportion of



THE DITCH AND WALL OF A FORT AT PORTAGEVILLE. INSIDE THE WALL ARE THIN REFUSE HEAPS WITH A FEW POTSHERDS AND TRIANGULAR POINTS

European articles displacing Seneca articles is greater as the villages are later in time. The characteristics of culture which mark the historic villages are common to the earlier sites, and seem constant throughout this transition period of the Seneca branch of the Iroquois.

Stretching south and west from the latest pre-European villages of the Seneca are still other sites, all of the pre-European period. Their relationship to the latest pre-European sites of the Seneca, and the similarity in their remains leaves no doubt that they are sites of Seneca villages of more remote time, marking the entrance of this nation into western New York, in the far remote time when the Seneca Nation split from some older stock and crystallized as a separate nation. Yet the characteristics of the later villages remain constant in these also, leaving no possible doubt that the characteristics noted as Iroquoian have been common to the Seneca branch of the Iroquois, at least, from the remotest time almost to the present.

Do these peculiarities characterize nations of Iroquoian stock other than Seneca? Mr. Parker excavated a great post-European Erie site at Ripley and on it found that the remains coincided in nearly every particular with those of the Seneca. The site was defended by an earth embankment. Its surface was covered with refuse heaps and ash pits in which triangular points and bone articles were abundant. Clay vessels and clay pipes were abundant and were decorated with designs similar in every way to those of the Seneca. A pre-European Erie site at Willoughby, Ohio, which I have examined yields remains identical in all respects. Thus it appears that all the characteristics of the Seneca were common also to the Erie branch of the Iroquois.

Until 1650, well within the historic period, the Niagara frontier was inhabited by the Iroquoian nation of Attiwandaronks, the "Neutral Nation" of Samuel Champlain. Several villages which can only be attributed to the Neuter have been thoroughly studied. One of the best known is that on Grand Island which I excavated for the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences. In general its remains are identical with those of the Seneca and the Erie. Its graves and refuse heaps contained articles of bone and antler. Every point

was of the small, triangular type. Clay vessels and pipes, similar in every way to those of the Erie and Seneca, were numerous. It can safely be said therefore that the Iroquoian characteristics of the Seneca and Erie were shared also by this third branch of the Iroquois.

That these are constant also in the villages of Iroquois not resident in western New York, is apparent in descriptions of the remains on the sites of Huron villages in Canada and the sites of villages of the lower Iroquois in eastern and central New York. In all these will be found the triangular point, the abundant clay vessels and pipes, the abundant articles of bone and antler. Most are defended sites, many are on hill tops, and all are marked by refuse heaps.

In McGill Museum, Montreal, there is shown a collection of articles from the site of the town of Hochelaga. This town was visited in 1534 by Jacques Cartier, who described it and made a list of words used by its inhabitants. This list shows that it was a village of Iroquois people. The articles from this site are all strictly of the Iroquoian type, so much so that pipes from Hochelaga of 1534 might be almost duplicated from collections made in western New York from sites inhabited a century later.

Since sites of well authenticated Iroquoian origin are thus characterized by this type of remains, and since this type is constant over a large area known to have been inhabited by Iroquois of various nations, then it is reasonable to assume that any site in western New York thus characterized is an Iroquoian site, even though no other knowledge exists of its occupants. For instance, there is a defended site at Shelby, Niagara county. From its refuse heaps come triangular points, clay potsherds and pipes, and bone articles. The potsherds bear the usual Iroquoian designs. We have no historical knowledge of the people who once lived there, yet there can be no doubt, judging from these remains, that they belonged to the Iroquoian family.

Going beyond this, we can safely say that even though a site yield articles of this type, and also articles of a totally different type, the site was inhabited at some time by people of the Iroquois

stock. For instance, two sites near Buffalo yield triangular points, abundant pottery and pipes made of clay, and bone articles, yet with these are found numerous notched points (fig. 62). The remains of the Iroquoian type show positively that the sites were once occupied by Iroquois, and, at the same time, or more probably

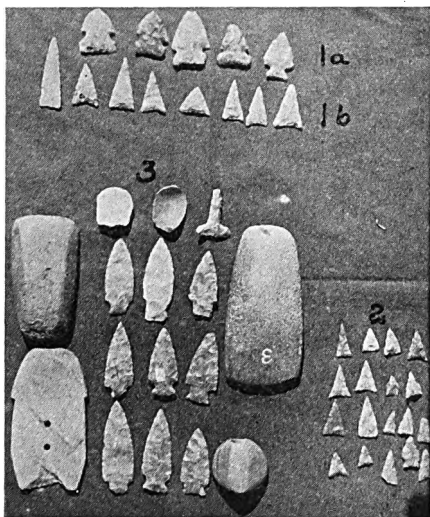


FIG. 62.—Articles from three sites at Conewango. 1a from one end of a knoll, 1b from the other end. (Two occupations). 2 from a site with refuse heaps. (Iroquoian type). 3 from a site with no refuse heaps. Note drill and slate articles. (Non-Iroquoian type).

at a different time, they were the abode of a non-Iroquoian people. This is proved conclusively by the fact that although the two types are found together on the surface, the numerous refuse heaps yield articles of the Iroquoian type only. Again, the site of the historic Seneca village of Honeoye (Anyaye), which was destroyed by an American punitive expedition in 1779, yields articles not only of the Iroquoian type but of an entirely different kind. It might easily be said that both types of articles were in use in this Iroquoian village, but a survey of the site shows that the Iroquoian articles are to be found at one end of the site in refuse heaps, and the non-Iroquoian articles on the surface of the other end. Evidently,

then, this site has been occupied not only during historic times by the Iroquoian nation of Seneca but at some unknown time by an unknown, non-Iroquoian people.

Because remains of this type characterize sites of known Iroquoian origin, and because these remains are constant on certain sites all over Iroquoian territory to the exclusion of all other types, it is reasonable to assume that a site characterized by remains of any other type is not of Iroquoian origin, even though it be in undoubted Iroquoian territory. This is certainly true of western New York (fig. 63). It may be that in other localities the character of Iroquoian remains differs from ours. I can readily understand

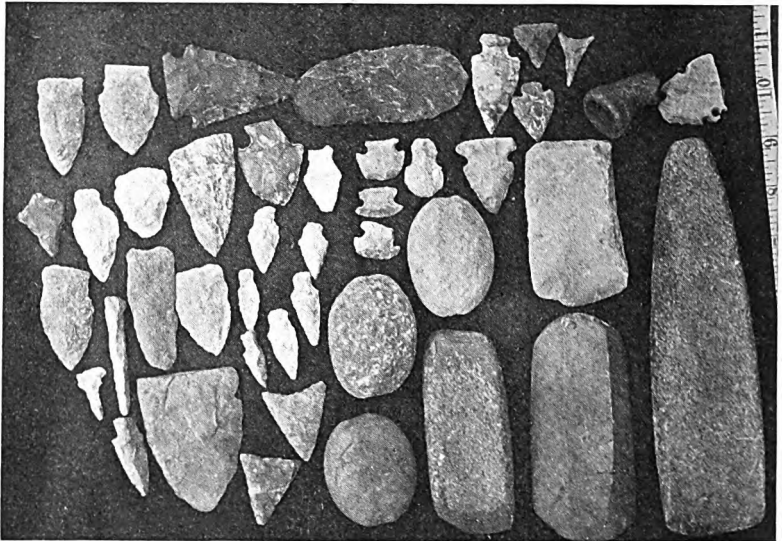


FIG. 63.—Articles from a site at Honeoye Lake, owned by Mr. Auger. Note beveled celts, gouges, notched scrapers and drills. The materials are chert, brown jasper, quartzite and rhyolite (?). These are typically non-Iroquoian, yet note the small triangles and clay pipe marking an Iroquoian camp.

that in territory devoid of chert, as Vermont or Quebec, chert points of the triangular type would be absent, and that if its place were taken by the local quartz, quartzite or slate, these would be better adapted for making the larger, heavier points, with notches for secure hafting. Yet so constant are these characteristics in a

large number of undoubted Iroquoian sites that there can be no doubt that their absence from a site warrants us in ascribing it to some people other than Iroquois.

In classifying sites as to their origin there has been amongst archeologists a tendency to disregard the remains found on them and to ascribe the sites to the nation which inhabited the territory during historic times. Such a tendency is entirely natural. For instance it is an undisputed historic fact that the Seneca inhabited the Genesee valley during historic times, and that there was a large Seneca village near Mt. Morris. On a site at Mt. Morris were two mounds, from which were taken some native copper articles, a necklace of river pearls and a "monitor" pipe. It was natural to assume that these graves were of Seneca origin. Yet the graves and their contents are typical, not of the Seneca of 1779 but of a people who lived in southern Ohio long before European time. Again, the Cattaraugus valley is assumed to have been in territory occupied by the Erie. Then what is more natural than to say that the site at the mouth of the creek is an Erie site, and the notched points found there are typically Erian? Yet as a matter of fact the remains on that site are typically non-Iroquoian, and therefore not Erian. Again, suppose that all the articles found in Ontario county were arranged in a museum, and the collection labeled as having come from that county. It was the seat of the Seneca Nation from the beginning of their history until the end of the eighteenth century, consequently the natural inference is that all the articles in the collection must be of Seneca origin, and that they constitute a typical exhibit of Seneca remains. Yet this collection would include articles from the graves of the great historic Seneca towns, from the refuse heaps of prehistoric Seneca villages, as well as from the innumerable non-Iroquoian sites scattered along its streams and lakes.

Disregarding these unmistakable characteristics of Iroquoian culture has been the cause of at least one serious error. In *Bulletin 140 of the New York State Museum* is an article by Mr. Luther in which he locates the "oldest Seneca village" at the head of Canandaigua Lake. He bases his article upon the facts that a Seneca village existed there and that he had collected Indian

articles in the fields there. Similarly the Department of Ethnology, in its *Handbook of American Indians, Bulletin 30* (p. 502) states of the Seneca that "When first known they occupied that part of w. New York between Seneca lake and Geneva (*sic*) r., having their council fire at Tsonontowan, near Naples, in Ontario co." As a matter of fact, the Seneca village was inhabited during Revolutionary times, and the articles which Mr. Luther attributed to this village are pre-European articles of the non-Iroquoian type, and therefore not Senecan.

With the characteristics of Iroquoian sites well established it is possible to use them in classifying sites in territory once inhabited by Iroquois outside of western New York. There is need of this classification in the Susquehanna valley where both Iroquoian Andaste and Algonkian Delaware lived in historic times; in northern Ohio, the historic seat of the Iroquoian Erie and of various non-Iroquoian tribes; in southern Quebec and the Canadian peninsula; and in western Vermont, the "Irocoisia" of Champlain. In all this territory there are innumerable sites, some of which must certainly be ascribed to Iroquoian nations, and exact data are needed regarding these to establish the course of the migration of the Iroquois into New York. There is need also of definite knowledge of the characteristics of non-Iroquoian sites. These must be established through a careful study of sites of undoubted pre-European Algonkian origin, in Canada and Pennsylvania.

BUFFALO, NEW YORK.